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Governor Announces Short-Term Energy Strategy

August 15, 2008

Plan Addresses Immediate Needs Without a Special Session

AUGUSTA – Governor John E. Baldacci today unveiled the details of a short-term plan that will begin to immediately address the dangers posed by high energy prices this winter.

"I have developed an action plan that puts State resources to work immediately," Governor Baldacci said. "My first priority is to protect vulnerable families and make sure everyone has access to the information and tools they need to prepare for winter."

The Governor's plan makes a special session of the Legislature unnecessary.

"I have consulted with our experts on fuel assistance, energy and human services, and we are able to take significant action without an expensive and uncertain special session," Governor Baldacci said. "If that changes, I will use the full powers of the Executive Branch to address any emergency."

The $12.585 million plan includes new investments in weatherization, low-income heating assistance, alternative modes of transportation, voluntary alternative work schedules for State employees, business development, training and education, and is targeted toward specific, attainable results within the next five months.

"Our plan puts resources where they can be most effective between now and December," Governor Baldacci said. "Our plan is responsible and will help keep people safe and secure in their homes."

The plan:

• Dedicates $4.25 million to increase the LIHEAP benefit to $500 per eligible household. The current benefit is estimated at $415.

• Creates a $3.25 million emergency fund in January to help families who either participate in LIHEAP or are slightly above the entitlement threshold in the event of a fuel oil emergency.

• Increases weatherization funding by $2 million, expanding our current program by about 500 homes. The new funding supplements an anticipated $6.5 million in weatherization funding, which will improve another 1,500 homes. Typical weatherization improvements can reduce fuel use by 20 percent.

• Invests an additional $1 million to clean, tune and repair the furnaces in an estimated 1,500 additional homes that are LIHEAP eligible. Typical CTEs can reduce fuel use by 10 percent.

• Reserves $1 million of available funding in the Economic Recovery Loan Program at the Finance Authority of Maine for eligible energy conservation projects for businesses in the State.

• Reprograms $1.01 million within the Department of Transportation to increase utilization of the GoMaine program, extends the Free Fare Fridays promotion, studies the State's Park & Ride network and improves access to rail services.

• Utilizes $75,000 to provide energy saving recommendations and program contact information to low-income Maine household.

• Distributes 2,000 Keep ME Warm Kits through MaineHousing.

MaineHousing will pull funds forward from future quarters to use immediately. The Governor will work with the Legislature to reimburse those funds when Legislature returns. Additional funding is available by redirecting available Community Development Block Grants, from the Public Utilities Commission and by reprogramming funding within the Department of Transportation.

The money will be restored either through reductions in other government programs or, as a last result, from the Budget Stabilization Fund when the Legislature returns.

"In 2006, we were able to take quick action at the beginning of the Legislative session to address low-income fuel assistance," Governor Baldacci said. "We can do that again this year."

The Governor also signed an executive order creating an alternative work schedule pilot program within the Department of Administrative and Financial Services. The pilot program will evaluate the effectiveness of alternative scheduling for State workers as an energy reduction measure. The program is voluntary and open to other interested agencies. The goal of the pilot is to have 95 percent of eligible requests granted, and to allow for four-day work weeks and other alternative schedules.

Following through on recommendations of the Pre-Emergency Energy Task Force, the Governor is creating a single point of contact for energy calls. In cooperation with 2-1-1, the improved system will be able to route callers seeking assistance or information directly to appropriate state agencies.

As part of improving the 2-1-1 system, requests for information will be filled within one business day and applicants for assistance or loan programs will have their requests processed within 30 days. To facilitate the quick response, the Governor sent a letter to State agencies today directing them to appoint an energy liaison that will be responsible for responding to requests.

"We also understand that increased food prices go hand-in-hand with higher energy costs," Governor Baldacci said. "While we are working on energy issues, we are mindful that we need to make sure families have access to healthy and nutritious foods."

In July, Maine's Department of Health and Human Services requested an increase in food stamp benefits for LIHEAP eligible families based on high energy costs. Earlier this month, that request was granted for families who aren't receiving the maximum benefit.

The Governor will also launch a pilot program to test EBT card readers at Farmers' Markets around the State. The readers will allow food stamp recipients to buy fresh, locally produced foods using their EBT cards at the markets.

Other efforts include training DECD personnel to understand energy saving methods for business that can be applied during their normal outreach activities, increase training courses for weatherization technicians, and improve access for information for homeowners who wish to make improvements themselves.

Attached are the Executive Order and the letter sent to Cabinet members.

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August 15, 2008

AN ORDER TO PROMOTE ALTERNATIVE WORK SCHEDULES TO REDUCE COMMUTING COSTS

WHEREAS, the recent and sustained rise in the cost of gasoline does not appear likely to subside in the immediate future; and

WHEREAS, Maine government is seeking to provide immediate relief to its employees from rising commuting costs; and

WHEREAS, maintaining current services to the public remains paramount; and

WHEREAS, Maine is seeking new ways of doing business to reduce energy consumption; and

WHEREAS, Maine government has an opportunity to lead by example and encourage other businesses to increase conservation by implementing alternative work schedules and telecommuting practices; and

WHEREAS, alternative work schedules and telecommuting are currently allowed yet may not be fully utilized;

NOW THEREFORE, I, John E. Baldacci, Governor of the State of Maine, do hereby direct the following:

1. Supervisors and managers are encouraged to seek ways to grant voluntary employee requests for telecommuting or alternative work schedules, provided current services to the public are maintained and an agency's operations are not otherwise adversely impacted.

a. State government will continue to serve citizens Monday through Friday during usual business hours.

b. State agencies will be required to report its alternative work schedule efforts to the Department of Administrative and Financial Services (DAFS), Bureau of Human Resources.

1. Employees who may not be interested in or may not be able to participate in telecommuting/alternative work schedule options are encouraged to pursue alternative travel options and their supervisors and managers should seek ways to grant requests for schedules that would allow participation in these programs without adversely impacting an agency's operations.

a. This may include the use of the GOMaine vanpools and the Maine Commuter Connects carpool matching service available through GOMaine (www.gomaine.org), as well as the ZOOM Maine Turnpike Express and other shuttle bus alternatives, where available. (www.shuttlebus-zoom.com).

b. The Maine Department of Transportation maintains a number of Park and Ride lots to encourage and promote carpooling www.exploremaine.org/parkandride/index.htm).

1. Beginning immediately a specific pilot program will be implemented within DAFS that seeks to have 95% of eligible requests for an alternative work schedule by employees granted. This pilot will run through December 31, 2008 at which time the program will be evaluated to determine its impact on energy use, employee productivity, customer service, and employee satisfaction/participation.

a. Employees will not be mandated to change their schedules and participation will be voluntary.

b. The goal will be to increase participation by having supervisors and management more receptive to alternative work schedules.

c. The results of the pilot and the evaluation prepared by DAFS will determine if the program will be expanded to all state agencies and will provide valuable feedback and guidance to successfully implement statewide.

Effective Date

Effective date of this Executive Order is August 15, 2008.

John E. Baldacci, Governor

August 15, 2008

Dear Cabinet Members:

Today I am announcing my Short -Term Energy Plan that maximizes the amount of work that can begin immediately to prepare for a potentially dangerous winter heating season. This strategy will increase weatherization, prepare for increased support for LIHEAP, improve outreach and education, enhance transportation alternatives, make State facilities more efficient, create new options for the State workforce and support innovative local efforts to combat high energy costs. This Plan derives from the good work of the Pre-Emergency Task Force and their Report released a few weeks ago.

As part of this initiative, 2-1-1 will be strongly promoted as the primary referral entity for people to obtain information regarding energy, food and fuel. Some of the 2-1-1 calls will be referred to state agencies and I am asking that each agency have a designated "energy liaison" to accept 2-1-1 referrals. The energy liaison will be responsible for responding to each 2-1-1 referral call within 24 hours (1 business day) and to provide an answer within 30-days (this could range from a discrete piece of information to a determination of eligibility for a grant or loan program). 2-1-1 will have the capability to track both the response time and the resolution of the referral.

I am asking that you send to John Kerry, Director of the Office of Energy Independence and Security, the name and contact information of the staff person at your department who is designated as the "energy liaison" to accept referrals from 2-1-1 during regular business hours. Please send this name to John by August 25th and copy my Chief of Staff, Jane Lincoln.

The designation of an "energy liaison" in your agency is a serious and important matter and will involve not only time in responding to 2-1-1 referrals, but also some training with the 2-1-1 program. I appreciate your participation in this Short-Tern Energy Plan and your commitment of staff time to this extremely important effort.

Sincerely,

John E. Baldacci

Governor